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Viewing cable 06MANAGUA1383, SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF STATE DEPARTMENT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA1383	2006-06-23 17:16	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA ASSISTANT SECRETARY THOMAS SHANNON AND
WHA SENIOR ADVISOR OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY MARIA TAMBURRI,
WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/23/2026
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#)
NU
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF STATE DEPARTMENT
ASSISTANT SECRETARY THOMAS SHANNON

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

11. (S) Summary/Introduction: Your visit to Nicaragua allows you to reiterate U.S. opposition to the Sandinista (FSLN)-Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) pact and assure the Nicaraguan people that we share their desire for free, fair, credible, and inclusive elections. Your presence will also confirm to Nicaraguans that the USG speaks with one voice vis a vis Nicaragua and will dispel the PLC's disinformation campaign alleging the removal of the Ambassador and its bogus linkage of the Deputy Secretary's resignation to a shift in U.S. policy. Meeting with both Liberal dissident Eduardo Montealegre and FSLN dissident Herty Lewites will demonstrate that we support principles and not specific presidential candidates. Preparations for Nicaragua's November 5 elections are generally on track, but critical challenges remain, including providing national/voter IDs to tens of thousands of Nicaraguans. Financial backing for Liberal dissident Eduardo Montealegre's campaign, including from local financiers and the Taiwanese, appears to be coming on board, if slowly. Montealegre's most immediate challenge is to unite the disparate egos and parties supporting him around a common purpose. End Summary/Introduction.

12. (C) President Bolanos still relies on FSLN and PLC support, or at least non-interference, in the National Assembly to effectively govern. The relapse of his son Javier, who suffers from leukemia, has understandably dampened his spirits. If his son's condition worsens, President Bolanos may be out of country during your visit. Bolanos considers CAFTA and the Millennium Challenge Compact the pillars of his lasting legacy for Nicaragua, along with achieving debt relief and his goal to turn over a country with a stable macro-economy and an ongoing IMF program to his successor. He is also justifiably proud of having taken a firm stand against the caudillos of corruption, although he recognizes that he has paid a heavy political price.

13. (C) President Bolanos has not succeeded in his lobbying of the Assembly to vote for MANPADS destruction. The military and the Defense Ministry (MOD) allege the problem lies with an uncooperative legislature, while lawmakers point fingers at the military and MOD for tying further destruction to military hardware in return. The PLC links its votes for MANPADS destruction on amnesty for Aleman and the FSLN ties its support to a meeting between the Ambassador and Daniel Ortega -- an unwise move during this pivotal election year.

¶4. (S) Your meeting with President Bolanos will allow you to reiterate our support for the Nicaraguan government (GON); congratulate him for supporting CAFTA-DR and the MCC compact; press him to act on his commitment to destroy all remaining in the Nicaraguan Army's inventory; and urge his government to resolve more outstanding property confiscations of U.S. citizens before the end of the 2005-2006 waiver period. You may also encourage President Bolanos to continue engaging his regional counterparts, the Taiwanese, and the region's private sector to back Montealegre's campaign, while avoiding public statements that suggest Montealegre is a cookie-cutter replica of his persona. President Bolanos and Foreign Minister Norman Caldera may also raise concerns over U.S. Immigration Reform Bill and how it might affect the thousands of Nicaraguans residing in the United States.

¶5. (C) Additional points to raise in your separate meeting with Foreign Minister Caldera could include the following:

--Appreciate his courage in publicly supporting U.S. efforts to ensure Nicaragua holds clean, fair, and credible elections and his denouncement of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' direct interference in Nicaragua's presidential campaign.

--Recognize GON support for its support of the adoption of the Third Additional Protocol and membership in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) for the Israeli national society, the Magen David Adom (MDA). Nicaragua voted in favor of the initiative during the June 20-21 International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

--Urge the GON to rethink its support for Japan's whaling policies (as a recipient of Japanese aid, the GON is reluctant to cross the Japanese on this issue, but some local environmental groups are starting to challenge the GON's position).

--Motivate the GON to revive its diplomatic relations with Iraq. According to the MFA, the GON never severed its diplomatic ties with Iraq, but its relations are not active. Caldera has expressed interest in meeting with the new Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations, Hamid al-Biyati, on his next trip to New York, possibly in July.

--Encourage the GON to send a military staff contingent to Iraq, Afghanistan, or Kuwait. While the GON is receptive to deploying de-mining specialists or light infantry to Iraq or Afghanistan, deployment would require a vote of approval from a hostile National Assembly. The Defense Minister has suggested, however, that sending de-mining specialists as part of the UN mission in Afghanistan or staff officers to Kuwait or Afghanistan may be more feasible. National Assembly approval would not be required.

U.S./CEPPS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ELECTION SUPPORT REVS UP
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¶6. (C) Our support for free, fair, inclusive and transparent elections is crucial, especially given the FSLN's and PLC's control over the National Assembly, the courts and the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE). Timely international technical assistance and monitoring will help stem the efforts of the FSLN and the PLC to fraudulently manipulate election results. During the recent voter list (padron) verification process, the CSE discovered that thousands of Nicaraguans had migrated from the Atlantic Coast North and South Autonomous Zones (RAAN and RAAS) back to the adjacent departments of Matagalpa and Jinotega. CSE President Roberto Rivas, ALN candidate Eduardo Montealegre, and others have called for an investigation into this apparent irregularity (NOTE: Montealegre suspects that the PLC may have moved supporters from Matagalpa and Jinotega to the Atlantic coast to stack the March 5 Atlantic Coast elections in its favor and these maneuvers would explain why the PLC fared better than expected in the RAAN.
END NOTE.)

17. (SBU) CEPPS partners IFES, IRI, and NDI and their local affiliates are now fully engaged in helping Nicaraguans prepare for their November 5 national elections. Election program activities are exerting a significant positive impact on the electoral environment, encouraging greater transparency and accountability from the CSE and increasing voter participation and awareness. As the political parties begin campaigning in earnest, we expect the civil society and technical assistance components of the program will rev up to ensure a more substantive debate and greater responsiveness to constituent interests. Your dinner with CEPPS partners and local affiliates will allow you to convey our appreciation for their fine efforts and query participants about specific concerns and areas of weakness that merit attention. A summary of CEPPS efforts:

-- Padron Audit: NDI, working with the local chapter of Ethics and Transparency (ET), finalized a civil society audit of the voter roll (padron) and presented their findings to political parties, civil society and the international community June 7-9. According to the audit, roughly 25% of the voting population is incorrectly listed on the padron, which will impede their ability to vote. Further, 10% of the voting population (individuals currently possessing a national/voter ID card, called "cedula") is not included on the padron. According to ET, both of these problems can be remedied through the CSE verification process. NDI redirected program monies from other projects to fund national observation of the verification process and a public awareness campaign. CSE President Roberto Rivas claimed that ET had not been "authorized" to perform a civil society audit of the padron, but the CSE has not refuted any of the findings of the study. NDI has offered to provide training to all the political parties on how to use the findings of the audit to ensure their constituents are registered to vote.

--Padron Verification: With over 21 percent of eligible Nicaraguan voters estimated to have verified their status and location on the official voters list (padron), the CSE proclaimed the June 10-11 and 17-18 verification process a

success. This assessment was supported by observers from the Carter Center and the Latin American Council of Electoral Experts (CEELA). IFES has worked closely with the CSE on padron verification, providing technical assistance and training for regional and municipal CSE officials. IFES invested 100% of their public awareness funds on the verification process given the potential impact on the upcoming elections and the CSE's unwillingness to invest adequate funding in the verification campaign. The OAS Election Observation Mission (EOM) fielded 29 observers.

--Voter Education and Awareness: IFES has doubled the capacity of the CSE voter hotline to meet the rising number of citizen inquiries regarding the electoral process. IFES has helped the CSE update its website, making it more interactive and responsive to voter inquiries. IRI has initiated grassroots voter awareness projects with four Nicaraguan civil society organizations. Youth Vanguard is distributing flyers promoting voting and cedula at university campuses. Movement for Nicaragua (MpN) has radio and television adds encouraging citizens to obtain their cedula prior to the August 6 deadline. MpN and the Institute for Development and Democracy (IPADE) are canvassing secondary schools encouraging 16-18 year olds to participate in the electoral process. MpN's youth outreach program reveals that 70-80% of the students visited have no cedula, while the majority of these youth plan to participate in the upcoming elections. MpN is working with the Ministry of Education to provide assistance and transportation to students interested in applying for cedula. JUDENIC is performing focus groups with youth to finalize the slogan and message of the Rock the Vote campaign, to begin in late June.

--Cedula Issuance and Retrieval: The CSE is focusing its

efforts on encouraging eligible voters to apply for their cedula and register before the August 6 deadline. To serve citizens who have requested but never received voter ID cards, IFES conducted an inventory of all outstanding voter IDs (roughly 200,000 nationwide). This information has been included on the CSE hotline and website and distributed to all CSE regional and municipal centers, as well as churches, civic centers, post offices and schools. With IFES support, the CSE is opening seven kiosks in high-traffic markets in the Managua metropolitan area for citizens to solicit voter IDs. The CSE claims these kiosks will provide expedited voter ID services in only 15 days. Public pressure on the CSE appears is working, as the price to obtain a cedula has dropped to 20% of the previous cost.

--Citizen Attention Centers: With NDI support, MpN has extended operations in Managua. It has also opened seven new Citizen Attention Centers (CAC) that help citizens to obtain birth certificates and soliciting voter ID cards (Rio Blanco, Matagalpa, Masaya, Esteli, Chinandega, Leon and Carazo). With additional funding, MpN will expand CAC coverage nationwide. MpN held a "Cedulathon" in Managua on June 17 with local bands and other entertainment to encourage youth to get their voter IDs and participate in the electoral process. Cedulathon proceeds will be used to support the CACs. You will visit one of the MpN Citizen Attention Centers during your stay.

--Political Party Poll Watching: IRI has finalized the training schedule for Herty Lewites' MRS and Eduardo Montealegre's ALN political party poll watchers, which will begin in late June and continue through August. Based on the lists submitted by both parties, IRI will train 12,000 poll watchers for MRS and 18,000 for the ALN. With additional funding, poll watcher training will be extended to Eden Pastora's Alternativa por el Cambio (AC) and poll watcher manuals will be distributed to all five parties. (NOTE: PLC and FSLN poll watchers receive training through the CSE, an institution totally controlled by these two traditional parties. END NOTE.)

OAS TAKES GLASS HALF FULL APPROACH, PRESENCE ON GROUND SPOTTY

18. (C) OAS Mission: The OAS grant should be finalized soon. In the meantime, a pre-award letter allows it to spend U.S. funds. Twenty OAS observers led by OAS Election Mission head Gustavo Fernandez and supported by political adviser Raul

Alconada arrived in country on June 5 for the padron verification process. Over the June 10-12 weekend, a team of three ex-foreign Ministers from the region joined the OAS team to add a political dimension to the process, and they met with leaders of the political parties competing in the November national election. The OAS believes that cooperation with the CSE is acceptable and the chances of the inhibition of any of the presidential candidates are low.

19. (C) The OAS is now addressing longer range issues: reform of the electoral law and regulations, what can be done to avoid entry into force of the pact-inspired constitutional reform to weaken presidential authority this January, and the possibility of real constitutional changes. During your visit to Managua, OAS Election Mission technical director Patricio Gajardo will be in country. However, Fernandez and Alconada's political team will not be present. The GON has expressed concern that the OAS team does not maintain a robust political presence here, a concern we share. Your meeting with Gajardo at the CEPDS dinner will provide you an opportunity to raise this concern.

RALLYING DONOR SUPPORT FOR COMMON ELECTION STATEMENT

10. (C) The Ambassador participates in regularly scheduled meetings of ambassadors representing donor countries. The DCM, USAID, and POL participate in working level meetings

focusing on election support. Embassy has been engaging members on the need to issue a joint donor statement in August to reiterate our common interest in, and commitment to, helping Nicaraguans hold a clean, fair, credible, and inclusive electoral process. Your encouragement could help consolidate this initiative.

REMINING VOTERS OF THE ORTEGA ERA

¶11. (C) The Permanent Human Rights Commission's (CPDH) investigation of Sandinista era abuses against Nicaragua's Miskito population, which we have supported, continues to draw attention to the failings of the Sandinista regime. On June 7, the CPDH formally denounced the alleged Sandinista genocide/atrocities committed against the Miskitos during the 1980s. The next day, CPDH held a press conference in Managua and filed evidence against Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega and others -- including written and video taped materials gathered from over one hundred witnesses and survivors -- before the attorney general's and public prosecutor's offices. Coverage of the cases has extended beyond Nicaragua including the United States.

¶12. (C) Responding to Zoilamerica's request for assistance in continuing her case before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) against stepfather Daniel Ortega for years of sexual abuse, Embassy provided her a small grant to pursue her case. She is currently in the United States, where she will meet with IAHRC and Department officials, as well as foundations that may be able to help her with pro bono legal assistance or support her foundation Sobrevivientes (Survivors). She will also meet with Spanish-speaking media in Miami and arrange an interview with Univision.

ARCHBISHOP REFRAINS FROM POLITICS, CARDINAL PROMOTES ORTEGA

¶13. (C) Unlike his predecessor Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo -- who is now openly campaigning for Daniel Ortega (even though the Nuncio told us the Cardinal privately favors Arnaldo Aleman) -- Managua Archbishop Brenes has largely refrained from using his office to engage in politicking. Instead, Brenes has urged dialogue and national consensus, calling for candidates to be sincere in their campaign promises and to refrain from smearing tactics. Your encouraging Brenes to continue this constructive, apolitical role would be helpful. You may clarify with him that our concern over a possible Ortega win in the elections stems from Ortega's anti-democratic rhetoric; his long record of complicity in human rights abuses -- including against the Miskito Indians; and, his probable sexual abuse of his own stepdaughter. (Note: On June 22, Brenes held a special mass for all of the presidential candidates; possibly he set the date knowing that Daniel Ortega was abroad. End Note.)

MONTEALEGRE SHIFTS INTO THIRD GEAR

¶14. (C) Arnaldo Aleman will not cede his leadership of the PLC and Daniel Ortega will not let him because he relies on Aleman to keep the right divided. Thus, a five-way race remains the likely scenario, although PLC candidate Jose Rizo may decide to withdraw if his numbers do not climb by September. Montealegre's most immediate challenge is to unite the disparate egos and parties supporting him around a common purpose. The results of the next poll to be released in July will provide a clearer idea of voter trends and may influence the direction of financial support. If Montealegre holds strong, and support for Rizo does not climb, Montealegre is likely to receive all the financial backing he needs. However, if Rizo's number rise, Pellas and other financiers may leave Montealegre hanging another month before they decide where to place the bulk of their support.

¶15. (C) Much of Nicaraguan and regional capital appears poised to back Montealegre's campaign, although some, like

Nicaraguan industrialist Carlos Pellas, are likely to hedge their bets by giving smaller quantities of cash to his competitors, including Daniel Ortega. Carlos Pellas has assured us that he will back Montealegre. Montealegre's running mate Fabricio Cajina confirmed to us on June 21 that Chamorro-Pellas family patriarch Carlos Chamorro told him that Montealegre will obtain the funds he requires. We have also confirmed that Taiwanese interests will support Montealegre's campaign and that they will not/not help PLC candidate Jose Rizo. Impressing upon Montealegre the immediacy of uniting his alliance around a common purpose and platform will be helpful. He may seek your reassurance that we will not cave to pressures from the PLC, which constantly waves the Ortega and Chavez flags to scare us into supporting PLC candidate Rizo.

ENGAGING HERTY

¶16. (C) Lewites has been effusive in his desire to maintain cordial, constructive, and cooperative relations with the United States. Lewites has also been supportive of CAFTA, with the observation that small farmers and small business must in some way be assisted. He favors MANPADS destruction, asserting "they are of no good use to anybody." Some Embassy contacts do not trust Lewites' intentions, noting that members of Lewite's immediate circle are "orthodox" Sandinistas. Others insist Lewites could eventually rejoin the Ortega fold; still others claim the bad blood between them is such that they will never form an alliance. We believe that for now, encouraging the Sandinista division and focusing USG criticism on the "Danielistas" specifically, instead of "Sandinistas" as a group, is appropriate. Keeping Lewites in the race will also subtract votes from Ortega and could spell the difference between Ortega's winning on the first round or losing on the second.

¶17. (C) Your meeting with Lewites will allow you to reinforce our position that we have no election favorite and that we support democratic candidates who desire responsible government and constructive relations with the United States. You may wish to encourage him to visit Washington (he has told us he might visit closer to the November election). His selection of Dr. Edmundo Jarquin (IADB consultant, lawyer and economist, former university professor, Ambassador to Spain and Mexico during the Sandinista regime, and a National Assembly Deputy in the early 1990s) as his running mate suggests that if elected, he would practice sound macro-economic policies.

MEET AND GREET

¶18. (U) Your meeting with the Embassy community will show high-level appreciation for their efforts to ensure Nicaragua holds free, fair, and transparent elections in 2006. The Mission has 80 American employees, 11 Family Member employees, 310 local engaged staff (LES), and 280 local guards. In addition to State and USAID, DAO, Mil Group, DEA, OBO, RLA, USDA/FAS/APHIS, Peace Corps, and Millennium Challenge Account offices are present. Construction began on

the New Embassy Compound in February 2005. The new embassy is situated on 13 acres; the former Ambassador ("Casa Grande") and DCM residences (currently Marine offices) are on the site. The expected date of completion of the Embassy is around April 2006. The new USAID complex will be co-located on the land and completed around May 2007.

TRIVELLI